

Washington, D.C. - Congresswoman Melissa Bean (IL-08), together with Reps. Bennie G. Thompson (MI-02), Bill Pascrell, Jr. (NJ-08), and Martin Sabo (MN-05), launched a frank dialogue today with leading members of the first responder community. Joined by leaders of the Federal Emergency Management Corporation and the National Volunteer Firefighters Association, the group focused on the projected effects of the proposed federal budget on the first responder community and how Congressional leaders can work with emergency responders to compensate for expected funding shortfalls.

Policemen and firemen across the country were concerned that the proposed budget dramatically cuts funding for numerous emergency preparedness programs, including the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program (AFGP). The AFGP, which provides much-needed grants to hundreds of fire departments across the country, had its funding slashed by more than 50%, from \$545 million to \$293.45 million.

Last year, Congresswoman Bean helped eight district fire departments including Wauconda, Grayslake, Gurnee, Round Lake, Hanover Park and Woodstock receive more than \$930,000 under the AFGP program. Although this program has proven to be greatly effective in providing local fire departments with the tools they need to perform day-to-day duties, as well as respond to large disasters, the cuts will constrain the size and number of grants made next year.

“Unfortunately, four years after 9/11 and even after the inadequate federal response to Hurricane Katrina, the government is still failing to implement the lessons we’ve painfully learned about how to best help our first responders prepare and respond to man-made or natural disasters,” Bean said.

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“Our local emergency management officials and the first-responders at the community level are our first line of defense.□ It is irresponsible to cut money that funds our local firehouses, trains our police officers to prevent and respond to terrorism, and helps our communities prepare for an emergency.□ Americans expect better – and America’s first responders deserve better.”

Rep. Thompson, Ranking Member of the Committee on Homeland Security; Rep. Pascrell Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Science, and Technology; and Rep. Martin Sabo Ranking Member of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security joined Rep. Bean and the emergency responder leaders at the event.

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